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Structural discrimination and racialized belonging in Denmark

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Abstract

This article addresses structural discrimination in everyday lives of non-white Danes and Danes of mixed racial heritage. We explore how discrimination (implicit, underlying, and discursive) is expressed and resisted in seemingly neutral interactions. Using structural discrimination as our framework, we look at how this type of discrimination contributes to the racialization of national belonging in Danish contexts. In particular, we examine how notions of 'Danishness' are discursively linked to constructions of whiteness. Further, we discuss some challenges that arise for racially 'mixed' and other racialized Danes in regard to constructions of Danishness. Such constructions, we argue, rely on (and express) racialized understandings and discriminatory assumptions which explicitly and implicitly influence the experience of (and potential for), belonging within constructions of Danishness. Our findings suggest that particular dilemmas arise in the lives of Danes with mixed racial heritage and other non-white Danes.

Keywords

Structural discrimination; denial; double bind

Sophie is a fifth grader at a well-known and progressive Danish private school in an affluent area, north of Copenhagen. One day she asks her teacher for help. Sophie wants her classmates Lasse and Marie to stop saying she is a mulatto and telling her she isn't a real

Dane (Sophie has Danish and Asian heritage). She also thinks it's unfair that some of the other boys call her classmate the Negro. Sophie expresses this to their teacher, hoping for help. The teacher has two transnationally adopted children with Ethiopian heritage which leads Sophie to believe, that the teacher will understand her complaint. The teacher, however, asserts that Sophie is being unreasonable and explains that there isn't anything to be upset about. She says there is nothing wrong with being a mulatto.'

The teacher adds that since the classmate hasn't said he is offended at being called the Negro, Sophie should 'Stay out of it.' When Lily, another girl in the class - who appears 'white', though her ancestry is not Danish - asks, 'What should we call them instead?' The teacher seems to agree and makes it clear that the students may continue to say Negro and mulatto since they don't mean anything negative by doing so. (Fieldwork notes, 2014)

In this exchange, race plays a central role. It is a point of contention and figures into how Sophie is defined and positioned in relation to her peers. Clearly, despite her own identification as a Dane and her resistance to racialized language, she is forced to acquiesce to language and treatment that is deemed acceptable by the teacher and her peers. The situation is an interesting and complex illustration of how structural discrimination surfaces in an everyday situation. In this case, race and racial discrimination are central issues. Race[i] is used to negate national belonging as well as to define and describe students in the class. Race is also implemented as an argument to negate Sophie's national belonging. The use of terms like mulatto and Negro, which are racializing and defining terms, are considered legitimate despite resistance. The teacher's inability to acknowledge this interaction as racially discriminatory, however, suggests that racial discrimination is somehow invisible or normalized to such a

degree that it is not perceived to be discriminatory. As such, it falls under our definition of structural discrimination.

This article embarks on an exploration of structural discrimination and its simultaneous denial. We are concerned with structural discrimination in connection with the racialization of national belonging. Using cases and narratives gleaned from the empirical study (such as the above), we discuss, illustrate and concretize some forms of structural discrimination. Structural discrimination, as we elaborate below, is implicit, rooted in normative frameworks, and expressed indirectly and often unwittingly. Such discrimination can be normalized to a degree that it simply is not seen to be discrimination. This naturalization creates a challenge, or barrier which complicates addressing, recognizing, and validating discrimination. We are interested in understanding how such opaque discrimination figures in the experiences and interchanges between racially minoritized and majoritized individuals. Further, how do these individuals navigate and understand incidents in which such discrimination is a factor?

The empirical material may, to an outsider, illustrate discrimination that appears direct, conscious, or intentional. However, as the example shows us, this is not necessarily how it is received in many Danish contexts. With our point of departure in existing research on the national paradigm of denial in regard to racism and discrimination within Danish cultural, social and language frameworks (Hervik, 2006), we suggest that a normalization of discrimination within Danish contexts renders even explicit and overt discrimination opaque, and difficult to identify. Understanding the role structural discrimination may play can hopefully shed some light on this paradox, where a discourse of denial negates a simultaneous existence (and experience) of discrimination. In light of the above, examining opaque or hidden structures may provide a useful framework for better understanding the co-existence of discrimination and its explicit denial.

Although this article employs material, cases and narratives from empirical research, it seeks to provide a theoretical discussion of structural discrimination. The empirical material is therefore mainly illustrative. The article is divided into a number of subsections. We start with theoretical background and explanation of terms. In the next section we discuss our analytical approach which is informed by postcolonial and critical race theory. Thereafter, using material from an empirical study conducted by one of the authors of this article, we exemplify and discuss race and racial discrimination are embedded within the daily norms and experiences of racialized Danes.

Structural Discrimination

Issues of race, ethnicity, identity, marginalization and so forth are gaining ground. Despite this, there are few explicit, theoretical discussions of structural discrimination. Much of what does exist is found spread over a range of disciplines. For example, structural discrimination is specifically defined and discussed in regard to racial discrimination (Kamali, 2009), sociological work (Hill, 1989; Williams, 1988), and in psychological research (Pincus, 1996; Allport, 1958). It is referred to in philosophical and legal studies (Appiah, 2000; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2006). Also, a number of country reports over the last decades have directed their focus to structural discrimination, though, in practice, the focus seems to be institutional- rather than structural discrimination as defined in this study.

Structural discrimination is understood here as a condition in which discriminatory attitudes are implicit in norms, practices, rules, and (tradition-bound) expectations in regard to behavior. It is not necessarily explicitly inscribed in, or a result of, formal processes or legal systems (laws, rules, etc.) as inferred in Fred Pincus' work. It can be a result of *informal* institutions and practices, habits, traditions, contextual and institutional norms, and can have

its point of departure in (normative) social, institutional, historical, and/or contextual (social) structures, beliefs and systems. In the introductory narrative, for example, structural discrimination resides under the surface of interactions. Sophie is subject to discrimination in the form of being defined and positioned by her perceived race. Her teacher's response to Sophie's protests suggests that this racialization of identity is normalized and seen as neutral, or acceptable. The way race is used to exclude Sophie from Danishness by her peers is either ignored or also seen as ordinary or even understandable. Her teacher makes it clear that this is legitimate language, and her protest is meaningless, or a misunderstanding. In the gap between Sophie's experience of discrimination and the norms that inform her teacher's response lies a gray zone. This space encompasses discrimination that can be hard to identify, acknowledge and articulate.

Structural discrimination, as we understand it here, is discrimination that can be identified in a gap or space between acknowledged and unacknowledged discrimination. That is to say, it includes discrimination and manifestations of discrimination that occur in such ways that they are not formally or legally acknowledged as discrimination, yet may be an expression of discrimination nonetheless. When the teacher insists that Mulat is acceptable, she is acting on such a manifestation. The term is widely normalized and accepted, though it is also a residual of colonial racial constructions. We understand structural discrimination as hegemonic and discursive. In addition, it is understood here in terms of all recognized discrimination grounds as defined in the international convention on human rights, and is not limited to race. Racial discrimination is, however, the primary focus of this article. Within the framework of structural, normative discrimination where structures refer to a dominant ideological framework: A system of thought and beliefs taken to be natural and self-evident, and reflected in language and practice.[ii]

Background

The term structural discrimination has been developed in several contexts, for example, in Robert B. Hill's work on discrimination (Hill, 1989; Hill, 1988), Robin M. Williams work on racial attitudes and behaviour (Williams, 1988), and in Fred Pincus' elaboration of the term (Pincus, 1996). Hill and Pincus, both of whom focus primarily on racial inequity, attribute persistent expressions of racial inequity to institutional structures and processes, as do others in the field. While Hill and Pincus define the term structural discrimination within an institutional framework, both point to the potential importance of abstract and historical elements, though they do not pursue this in particular.

Hill and Williams also point explicitly beyond institutional frameworks. Hill, includes 'the processes of human organization, their invisible laws and unique characteristics' (Hill, 1988, p. 354). Williams points to the importance of context and interactions, codes and social frameworks, and particularly, the complexity and imbrication of discrimination within societal norms and their influence (Williams, 1988). He refers to normative factors within dominant group ideology, which he defines as 'sets of values, beliefs, and norms of dominant groups that are used to legitimize and justify current dominant-subordinate group relations' (Williams, 1988, p. 363).

Like Hill and Williams, our understanding of structural discrimination encompasses more than institutional discrimination and includes a historical, postcolonial perspective. This framework is also integral to critical race theory, as well as work on everyday racism such as that of Philomena Essed (1991), as well as with the notion of racism without racists as framed by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010). Both work with an understanding of broader and more abstract structures from which individual and shared racist practices arise.

In the examples and narratives we discuss, intention is a recurring theme. Sophie and Mette are both met with situations in which there is no apparent maliciousness. Yet both are impacted by discrimination. Because discrimination and racism are associated with ill intent, a dilemma arises when it occurs without desire to harm. Very briefly, this issue is addressed in differing ways in discrimination literature, but there is a wide consensus that discrimination occurs inadvertently. We find, in the interaction under scrutiny here, that prejudicial attitudes are imbricated within the normative (ideological) framework underlying unintentional discriminatory behaviours. That is, discrimination is a consequence of normalized discriminatory attitudes and prejudice, which in so far as they may be reflexive can be said to occur without explicit or conscious intention. This may result in discrimination that is socially sanctioned, though there remains a potential for discomfort or disturbance that makes a full ignorance difficult (Skadegård & Horst, In review).

Method

While our empirical study cannot be fully described in the scope of this article, the main components, briefly described, are comprised of a 4 year study combining interviews, formal and everyday/informal observation and written reflections. In this article we limit our material to cases and narratives from interviews and written reflections which we briefly describe below.

18 in-depth interviews were conducted with visible minority Danish university students. To avoid falling into a grey zone where racialization and racial discrimination can thus be deflected as neo-racist concerns with culture, as described in the forthcoming section on denial our interviewees are racialized Danes. Our subjects are not necessarily culturally different from the majority, nor do they necessarily have immigrant backgrounds. As such,

this group can be said to differ from the dominant group primarily on the basis of skin color. We thus deflect issues of social background, and class as potential discrimination grounds that could blur the matter of discrimination based on visible difference.

The interviews were semi-structured (Holstein, 2003) allowing for some freedom to pursue differing interest areas and issues as they came to light during the interviews. All informants were asked the same questions. In these interviews, the informants discussed family, childhood and school experiences and were asked to elaborate about their identity and sense of belonging within a national paradigm. Among other things, they were asked to describe situations in which they felt discriminated, or had observed discrimination of others, as well as to define, in so far as they were able, distinctions between racism, discrimination and racial discrimination. 16 of the 20 interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In addition to interviews, we include material from reflections on discrimination by majoritized and minoritized university students. Approximately 100 masters and bachelor level students (over several years), who had participated in a class on discrimination, were asked to write free style reflections after their sessions (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). The students included both racially majoritized and minoritized students. They were asked to write whatever came to mind on the topic of discrimination. Their reflections could include their own experiences and observations, disagreements, questions, or concerns that had come up in class, and any other thoughts they found relevant in connection with the session. They were then given the option to allow this material to be part of the empirical study in anonymized form. All students gave consent and none chose anonymity. We, however, have decided on anonymity in regard to both interviews and reflections. As such, all names have been changed.

The complexity of identity as intersecting categories such as gender, skin color, religion, social class and so forth notwithstanding, we focus, as far as possible, on visible minority status (skin color and other visible constructions of difference). We avoid conflating race with cultural and/or social background as these have been seen to compete as explanatory factors when addressing questions of discrimination and racism (Yilmaz, 1999; van Dijk, 1991; Solomos, 1993). Students that identified as Danish and that had a high degree of success academically were also chosen because there is little, if any, focus on this particular group in Danish research on exclusion, inclusion and discrimination.

Analytical framework

We rely on postcolonial and Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory, originally an approach to understanding how racism and discrimination are embedded in legal frameworks, addresses discrimination and intersections of race, gender and power, particularly institutional power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Gillborn, 2004; Sue, 2010), is now widely applied to other academic fields and disciplines. Using this critical perspective, we examine discrimination, particularly implicit and underlying, indirect discrimination embedded in social practices.

Our reading of the material focusses on how subjects navigate when they are met with discrimination that is subtle and normalized. Postcolonial and feminist discourse theory which are also precursors to critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), provide a lens through which we understand the role certain underlying power frameworks, and neglected, historically situated and postcolonial perspectives, play in contemporary, Danish discrimination dynamics. Gayatri C. Spivak states that:

> '… there can be no doubt that the apparently crystalline disciplinary mainstream runs muddy if these [postcolonial] studies do not provide a persistent dredging operation.' (Spivak, 1999, p. 1)

In this regard, our interest is centered on dredging through micro processes and interactions across perceived difference, and how these are inscribed in broader social (macro) dynamics and practices. That is, how micro processes - such as specific interactions between individuals - draw on broader social norms and legitimizing structures.

Discriminatory constructs are intertwined with historical colonial frameworks. Edward Said points out how:

> 'Theses of Orientalist backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West most easily associated themselves early in the nineteenth century with ideas of about the biological bases of racial inequality' (Said, 1978, p. 206).

Though material realities have changed outward form or political structure, they continue to mirror certain colonial dynamics, such as constructions of race, dominant and subordinate social and political groupings.

As Debra Van Ausdale & Joe R. Feagin describe in their work on young children and the influences of implicit societal structures and attitudes, 'hierarchical constructions of race, carry-over from colonial processes, remain influential and formative in contemporary attitudes and beliefs' (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 57).

In the interactions we examine, race plays a central role in discrimination dynamics. This enforced difference from the dominant majority along visible lines mirrors colonial residue as

described in, for example, Anne Phoenix's research on discrimination and intersectionality in Britain. She points out that:

> 'These psychological and sociological processes operate simultaneously to produce a process of subjectification in which children from the (ex-) colonies are positioned in ways that necessitate their engagement with constructions of themselves as devalued'. (Phoenix, 2006, p. 106)

In the following analytical explorations, we unfold some dynamics which surface in our material. We start with how discrimination is imbricated in everyday language and norms. We address how such imbrication contributes to denial of discrimination. We then discuss how structural discrimination can result in a double bind: Discrimination occurs but is neither intended nor recognized. The subject is thereby in a position where challenging discrimination can cause further marginalization.

Discomfort and Denial

In the exchange described above, Sophie explains that she does not have African heritage, and it is her understanding that the word *mulatto* is offensive. When she speaks to her teacher, however, these concerns are simply not addressed. The teacher does not examine or discuss the conflict with the involved children. Sophie's protest appears to be understood merely as a question of terminology (the correct word for the category), not exclusion on the basis of perceived race, nor a questioning of the precision or legitimacy of such a racial category. Sophie's right to define her own identity, or to protest her positioning within this perceived racial category is apparently not a consideration.

When Sophie protests the use of racialized language (*mulatto*, *Negro*), Lily asks 'What should we call *them* instead?' The question infers certain assumptions about difference. It describes a *we* and *them* framed around perceived racial categories as natural. It further presumes entitlement, a *we* with the right to name or define *them.* Unlike Sophie, Lily does not have Danish heritage, yet she positions herself as *we*. Her claiming of a position within the defining *we* infers belonging by way of a normative whiteness and its link to the dominant and defining group.

In a reflection paper, Mette describes how her non-whiteness marks her as not Danish. '*To this day, when I tell someone that I am Danish, the normal reaction is 'But where are you originally from? Are you adopted? Where are your parents from?' And even though questions like these have become normal for me, and even though I know that the people asking are just curious, it emphasizes continuously that I am apparently not really Danish, even though I've never been anything but a Danish citizen!!'*

Both Mette and Sophie are socially positioned outside of Danishness due to perceived race. The type of discrimination they experience is subtle, or underlying. As such, it is unlikely to be acknowledged as formal or direct discrimination. Yet because nationality is *raced* racial discrimination occurs in both cases.

Seemingly neutral interactions such as these, can be thickly layered, and thus encompass a broad spectrum of discriminatory dynamics with comprehensive implications (Carter, 1990; Clark & Clark, 1939; Rowe, 1990; Goff, et al., 2008; Sue, 2010). When Sophie asks for help in regard to the use of a racial categorization (*mulatto*) denial plays a central role. Not only is the teacher quick to deny any negative or discriminatory implications involved in using this racialized identity category, saying 'There is nothing wrong with being a *mulatto*,' she further

denies Sophie's right to determine how she should be categorized and included within Danishness.

This can be read in several ways. Van Ausdale and Feagin, for example, point out that 'Most adults go into denial when it comes to acknowledging racist attitudes and actions among children' (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 2). They assume that children cannot really behave in racist and discriminatory ways. It is possible that, as Feagin and Van Ausdale suggest, the teacher responds as she does because she cannot imagine that young children discriminate on the basis of race.

It is also possible, that the teacher genuinely does not recognize the behaviour as racially discriminatory. She may well really believe that there is '…nothing wrong with being *mulatto.*' The notion of *mulatto* as a category exists in everyday usage, thus it is possible that it is deeply integrated or sedimented as a concept in the dominant hegemonic framework. It operates as an assumed truth which seems difficult for the teacher to address critically or reflect upon with any distance. As such, it is experienced as a natural, unquestioned category rather than a racial construction.

As a white, adoptive parent of black children, the teacher is symbolically and socially positioned as non-racist and non-discriminatory. When she denies that racist terms such as *mulatto* are problematic, she has authority not only as an adult and a teacher, but as presumably non-prejudiced by way of her parental status. While her denial may also have other motivations, what is in focus here is the tension between broad and accepted beliefs about racial discrimination and the impact and experience of discrimination on minority positions.

Deflecting and exoneration

Mette infers that such exchanges have consequences. She feels continually challenged and doubted in regard to her sense of Danish identity. On the other hand, rather than call out discrimination, Mette excuses or deflects the questioning she is submitted to as curiosity, emphasizing that the question is not ill meant. By doing so she suggests that it is legitimate to be curious about non-whiteness in a Danish context. On the one hand she recognized the underlying, excluding and racist message (you can't be truly Danish when not white) and on the other she infers that such thinking, while hurtful is somehow warranted. Yet she also indicates that there is a paradox or tension, she is Danish yet it is somehow reasonable or natural that this be doubted. She has no recourse, and accepts or complies with such assumptions about Danishness, absorbing the punch rather than protesting.

In Sophie's case, the teacher neatly moves the discussion away from discrimination. Insisting that '*They don't mean anything by it*' takes precedence over any potential negative impact or effect. Yet effect or negative impact is a central issue when we look at structural – as well as other – discrimination. It is hardly any secret that 'Racist behaviour, intentional or not, usually causes harm to its target' (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002, p. 9). As such, intent is not necessarily of central importance, since it is the discriminatory act itself that has an impact. Interestingly, research has shown that unintentional discrimination may be more harmful than intentional discrimination

> '…, because no guesswork is involved in discerning the motives of the perpetrator. Unconscious and unintentional bias, however, is ambiguous, and subtle and prejudicial actions are less obvious. …, they create psychological dilemmas for marginalized group members' (Sue, 2010, p. 9).

What seems important for the teacher is not what impact this situation may have on Sophie, but whether there has been an intention to do harm. She insists on the legitimacy of *mulatto*, intensifying the violation (invalidating protest) by authorizing its use. She emphasizes that the children don't '*mean anything by it*' while ignoring the impact of the exclusionary dynamics in the exchange on Sophie. Strategically it could appear to be a defense, or perhaps an assertion, of the dominant or hegemonic position. Of course, it is also possible that the teacher simply isn't comfortable with, or prepared for, discussing such issues with the children.

Regardless, when the teacher focusses her concern on the issue of intent, she shifts the issue away from Sophie, who has experienced discrimination, and concentrates instead on exoneration. This blurs the issue. It places emphasis on averting blame. It seems more pressing to deny discrimination and by doing so, reproduce and reaffirm implicit structures, than to consider the consequences that discrimination may have. This also privileges the perpetrator, resulting in a further marginalization of the victim (Skadegård, 2016).

The teacher's move (and Mette's denial) raises a further possibility and a difficult question. Is there a level of awareness of inherent racial discrimination which motivates such a move? Why is exoneration seemingly more important than addressing discrimination? Does this apparent need to focus on the legitimacy of racist or discriminatory behaviour belie an underlying anxiety or awareness in some way? Certainly the need to deflect the discussion and defend the behaviour suggests this is a possibility.

Ignoring the feelings of a child in her charge in order to insist on the innocence of the offending activity seems an unusual response for a teacher. It is possible that this manoeuvre may belie a discomfort or perhaps a recognition, at some level, which leads to the need to defend the dominant position (Skadegård, 2016).

To sum up, Mette infers that it is natural or reasonable enough that her Danish identity can be called into question because of her physical appearance. The teacher finds *mulatto* to be a neutral word. Both situations, however, reflect dominant normative beliefs about constructions of race and Danishness. The children in Sophie's class assume that *mulatto* is linked to notions of legitimacy, nation and belonging and use this as a way to position/define Sophie as not-really-Danish. Mette's acquaintances use her colour in the same way. Such interactions suggests a shared understanding of a particular construction of Danish in which *mulatto* and non-white cannot fully be a part. They *know* this in some way. These gestures illustrate how discrimination (as structural discrimination) resides between the cracks. It is implicit in norms and everyday practices, shapes interactions and underlies the way Danishness is negotiated and constructed.

Racialized language as normalized discrimination

When Sophie's teacher invalidates Sophie's protest, several things could be at play. For example, it is possible that Sophie is seen as a killjoy, creating discomfort by bringing this issue to the fore. This type of position is often punished with irritation or rejection (Ahmed, 2004). Further, according to Debra Van Ausdale and Joe R. Feagin, 'the formulations and beliefs about racial and ethnic origin are already in place in the social milieus into which children are born' (2002). We live in a society where race is central to social organization at all levels of life, and children are not invulnerable to these forces. Children enter the world equipped to make sense of these belief systems. Most soon recognize and accommodate the realities of social life (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 92). Sophie's peers seem to have understood and absorbed not only the term itself, but its implied meanings as well, '… there is

a social and cultural structure of racialized language, concepts, practices, and role expectations within which children operate' (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002, p. 34).

This structure is situated within broader social and historical structures which embrace the origins of constructs of race as they inflect social understandings today. The teacher may not be unaware of this, though she may find it discomfiting, choosing instead to ignore or deny it. As such, this blurs the question of intent or innocence.

Sophie and Mette are both Danish. They speak Danish, live in Denmark, and have grown up with a Danish frame of reference. In this sense it is hard to distinguish them from their peers in terms of national belonging. However, they are perceived as different, as non-white, or *mulatto.* These constructions of difference are subject to a particular valuing (or de-valuing). Their difference relies on an arbitrary, socially constructed factor (race) and its influence on shared notions of sameness and belonging. This occurs within a socially and historically situated perception of a constructed, particularly located, and expressed difference: A colonialized historicity in which constructions of race position the non-white subject as outsider to the possibility of European identity (Fanon, 1967). That is not to suggest that there is no difference between individuals, it just means that the differences that are defined and given salience are neither essential nor outside a production within a dominant framework.

Mulatto is not Sophie's word. Danish, however, is Sophie's language. She is framed within and formed within this language, as are her peers. Her status as *a mulatto* is upheld by the dominant framework that constructs and/or *knows* what a *mulatto* is. The term *mulatto* is a commonly used in Danish to infer a person of mixed race. It is not generally considered discriminatory or problematic in everyday use. *Mulatto* as a condition or truth is dependent upon the sovereign subject. At the same time, the sovereign subject/dominant discourse, in

this understanding, is less explicitly, but nonetheless intrinsically, dependent upon the existence of a construction of the *mulatto* (or other constructions of otherness) as an oppositional category in order to exist within this framework. That is, Sophie cannot be a *mulatto*, unless there is something that is not *a mulatto*. Danishness cannot be defined in opposition to *mulatto*, unless there is an underlying understanding that *mulatness* represents something other than or outside of, Danishness. This suggests an implicitly racialized inflection of this construction of Danishness.

Further, the very notion or concept of *mulatto* rests on a constructed biological notion of race which is an inherently colonialist production. That is, it infers the physical markings of a biological mixing of race, and thus inscribes itself in a racially inflected discourse (Baker, 1998; Jordan, 1962). Such a construction, in the described interaction, is imbued with a value, or meaning. This term may no longer have a conscious, explicit meaning of race as a marker, for example, by defining the percentage of access to property ownership or legal equality (Hickman, 1997; Roth, 2005). However, it does continue to bear enough implicit hierarchical value and meaning to justify a positioning as outside Danishness, or not really Danish. This discourse of belonging smacks of colonial racist discourses. It underlies an implicit sense or notion of Danishness as a particular construction of whiteness that Sophie's peers incorporate and use to undermine Sophie's entitlement or right to call herself Danish. She is defined in opposition to the Danishness as a racialized object – *the mulatto* – Sophie.

Whiteness and belonging

What is in focus here is the inherent marginalization in the position of the defined and in its relationship to the definer/dominant subject within a hegemonic structure. In the interaction, Sophie is marginalized, defined and *othered* in rhetoric and actions that bear the markings of

postcolonial gestures. Mette's placement outside of legitimate Danishness is a similar gesture, though in her case her nationality, or Danish identity is refuted on the grounds of race without the actual employment of a racialized term. Here, she participates in the shared but tacit knowledge of Danish as white. Like *mulatto,* being non-white is also contrasted with Danishness. The perceived brown body thus becomes the defining framework and arena for negotiating identity and belonging: An arena in which power is enforced and embodied (Foucault, 1980, pp. 25-26). Complex individuality, national identity and group belonging are reduced to a question of race. It marks –or in Erving Goffman's terms *stigmatizes* – Mette and Sophie as outside Danishness, and leaves them without *quite* the same legitimate claim to Danishness that a white person, regardless of national background, would have (Goffman, 2009).

Discursively, *being a mulatto* or non-white are identity constructions which are pitted or positioned *in opposition to* Danishness. That is, when used, the term stands alone. it is a noun, not an adjective, and defines rather than describes. In speech, it is used *in place of* Danish, as a free standing racial signifier, and not as an adjective inferring color alone. Thus, despite there being 'nothing wrong with being a *mulatto*,' the material reality that must somehow be integrated into navigations of self, other and belonging, suggests that there is, indeed, plenty wrong with being a *mulatto*.

Double Bind and double marginalization

Mark (an interviewee) describes how, while involved in planning an introduction week at university for new students, he was called a sand-Negro by another student in the planning group. When Mark protested the use of this term, the other student insisted that this language was not only acceptable, but merely a factual statement referring to his light brown (mixed)

skin tone. Mark countered by explaining that the word was a reference to biological race and thereby infers negative and hierarchical connotations. He explained further that he found this insulting and inappropriate. Mark was accused of being unreasonable and unable to take a joke by the other student and a group of peers that had witnessed the incident. (Fieldwork notes, 2014)

Such paradoxical situations can be precarious to navigate, and are not unlike what Gregory Bateson describes in his theory of the double bind. Bateson's double bind addresses certain communicative complexities and particularly some paradoxes embedded within communicative sequences. The term describes '…unresolvable sequences of experiences,…' (Bateson, et al., 1956, p. 3) – for example situations where confusion arises, for example between a message and a meta message – or a paradoxical relation between these – where the one message is a negation or denial of the other. Despite this, these messages co-exist and have equal value. As such, a tension arises which may provide challenges for the subject. There is, thus, a continuous system that produces conflicting messages and demands which bring the subject into a state of subjective distress (Bateson, et al., 1962; Bateson, et al., 1956).

In the above, Mark navigates within several contradictions. He is racialized, yet this is denied by his peers. He counters with rational and factual information, which is not acknowledged. Broader societal meta-messages such as the salience of knowledge, equality, and non-discrimination are countered by his material experience. These contrasting messages comprise the double bind. When Mark protests, he is excluded by his peers.

Like in Sophie's case, Mark is told that sand Negro is not derogatory. This complex interaction, among other things, enforces his marginal position, the illegitimacy of his

resistance, and the basis for this claim. His discomfort, sense of right and wrong, and experience of violation are called into question. His right, even, to critique the norms within which he is defined and violated is superseded or simply not recognized. The problem lies not in the center and its use of a racist term, but in Mark's *incorrect* (and irritating) interpretation. The logic of postcolonial reason places Mark outside, in a space of irrational, culturally non-fluent mis-understanding. He is perceived to be mistaken, unreasonable; like Said's gendered and othered East, which he also represents as sand Negro, he is contrasted with a presumed white Danishness. Further, as a perceived outsider, he, apparently, doesn't get it. His codes are (claimed as being) not in alignment with shared norms. When he forces the question of the legitimacy of the behaviour in question, he is a killjoy that disturbs and disrupts. Implementation of symbolic power and violence precludes any need to address the validity of Mark's experience and thus restores order.

In interactions across perceived difference, violence exists materially, explicitly, and implicitly. Center and margin, legitimacy versus non-legitimacy, face off, and margin inevitably loses. The sovereign subject as normative framework, either impedes or denies recognition or validation of the marginalized experience on what appears to be purely a basis of might. It is precisely here that the materiality of the experience and of the margin is doubly cemented, or increased, through the center's denial, and the legitimacy of this denial. Thus a kind of absurdity – a paradox of marginalization – can occur in which contesting or pointing to marginalization exacerbates the marginalized condition, rather than remedying or addressing it. Mark is unable to respond effectively or initiate any useful response in the context of this interaction – he is alone and unsupported in his opposition.

If a national discourse of denial underscores the non-existence or non-possibility of racism and discrimination, then individual experiences of discrimination are impossible from

this standpoint. A double bind incurs. The voice of the sovereign subject is constructed within this framework as intrinsically not–prejudiced. Ideology, a sense of (or anxiety about) what is natural and true, makes acknowledgement of Mark's experience difficult, if not impossible. If Mark is validated, it undermines the normative framework within this understanding of being intrinsically non-discriminatory.

Concluding thoughts

Drawing on the dynamics discussed here, we suggest that constructions of Danishness implicitly infer certain notions of whiteness. This seems to present certain challenges for Danes who are of mixed and non-white heritage. For example, their sense of entitlement in regard to Danish identity becomes a negotiation they must address in their everyday interactions. As Danes, they are insiders. They are constructed and positioned within the Danish language, framework, and norms. They have insider knowledge of language, meaning, codes and underlying messages. At the same time, they are discursively positioned as outsiders. They are and are not Danish, and must therefore navigate in this double bind of simultaneous acceptance and rejection. Another issue they must address is the conflict that incurs due to tendencies to deny discrimination.

One of the issues we discuss is the framework or a structure that exists in which positions are defined according to constructions of race. We find that the taken-for-grantedness of this not only makes the issue opaque, it also facilitates the dominant position in being just that, dominant. A silencing of minority resistance and an insistence on the legitimacy of the dominant framework positions the margin (racialized Danes) in a paradoxical position of double marginalization and forces the margin to remain as margin. The condition of being

simultaneously inside and outside further complicates and cements this paradoxical positioning.

Several questions arise in this exploration. One such question is whether the widespread denial of discrimination might belie an underlying anxiety or awareness of racial discrimination that could function as an impetus to deflect or deny. Another possibility, among others, is that denial is necessary in order to maintain a sense of order, or power. Perhaps it is also necessary in order to maintain a belief in an inherent shared Danish cultural decency as non-discriminatory. We suggest that expressions of discrimination are not necessarily innocent of intent or awareness. Rather, they express underlying discriminatory perspectives that are normalized. These are naturalized to such a high degree that the resulting discrimination becomes invisible or opaque in certain interactions and contexts.

The purpose of this article has not been to discuss *whether* discrimination is a challenge, but rather, *how* it is articulated and expressed, and as such, how it is a challenge for mixed and non-white Danes. Focus has been on structural discrimination, which remains embedded in language and practices, and in seemingly neutral daily interactions and expressions. The discrimination in focus is underlying and implicit within specific manifestations of discrimination in practices, relations, non-verbal and verbal interactions, and other abstract or concrete forms.

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, our intention was to employ our cases in order to unravel and expose some of the complexity and taken-for-granted assumptions intrinsic in some interactions across perceived difference. In regard to legitimate majority Dane and visible minority Dane, we find a precarious balance of power centered around discourses of legitimacy and entitlement, rights and privileges, shakily balanced on the color line.

[i] We use the word race here in the sense of a social (and experienced) construct. We do not intend to imply that it depicts any biological truth.

[ii] In addition to a conflation of institutional, systemic and structural discrimination in definitions of structural discrimination in various reports and contexts, structural racism is another term that is used similarly. For example, in *Structural racism and youth development: issues, challenges, and implications, 2005*.

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